

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS AND EXAMPLES ON TIMELINESS OF APPLICATION PROCESSING

Note: FNS reporting items 71(b) and 68 are equivalent to Q5i Items 010-0029 and 010-0030 respectively

Question 1: The regulations at 273.2(h)(2) allow the State agency to either deny or hold pending an application if it has requested verification in a timely manner but the applicant does not provide it by the 30th day. Will such cases be considered timely or untimely for this measure?

Answer 1: For performance year 2003 these cases will be considered untimely for this measure. Any application processed outside of the 30-day processing standard, for whatever reason, is untimely.

For performance year 2004 these cases will not be included in this measure. We will not review applications where the State agency has properly pended a case in accordance with 273.2(h)(2) due to incomplete verification and it has acted in accordance with the requirements at 273.2(h)(1). If the State agency improperly holds an application pending for any reason other than incomplete verification it will be considered untimely for this measure.

Question 2: If a case is certified more than once during the fiscal year, which certification should the QC reviewer measure for timeliness?

Answer 2: The QC reviewer should measure the most recent certification for or prior to the sample month when the case has been certified multiple times in the fiscal year.

Question 3: When coding for certification/recertification, should the QC reviewer only look at the last action?

Answer 3: For performance year 2003 the QC reviewer must determine if the case being reviewed was certified at the *last action*. If the sample month's benefits are based on a recertification, the QC reviewer must code the case as a recertification.

For performance year 2004, the QC reviewer must determine if the case being reviewed was certified within the fiscal year. If the sample month's benefits are based on a recertification, the QC reviewer must look beyond the last action to determine if the case was originally certified within the fiscal year. If it was certified within the fiscal year, it is considered a certification and evaluated for timely processing.

Question 4: When a household files an application after its certification period is over, but within the next 30 days, is this considered a certification or recertification?

Answer 4: The application is considered a certification. For purposes of this measure, any application filed after a recipient's certification period is over, even if it is within the 30 days immediately following his certification period, is subject to the 30-day processing standard and therefore shall be considered a certification.

Question 5: If an applicant files an application prior to the end of his certification period, but for some reason or another the State agency does not act on that application until after the certification period is over, is it considered an application for recertification or for certification?

Answer 5: The application is considered a recertification. Any application filed prior to the end of a certification period, no matter when it was acted on, shall be considered an application for recertification and will not be evaluated for timeliness.

Question 6: When does the 7-day clock begin for measuring expedited service processing, on the date of application or on the date that the State agency discovers the applicant is entitled to expedited service?

Answer 6: The 7-day expedited service standard begins on the date of application and NOT on the date the State discovers the applicant is entitled to expedited service.

Question 7: What constitutes the "opportunity to participate?"

Answer 7: The "opportunity to participate" consists of providing households with authorization documents (ATP cards), coupons, or EBT cards and having issuance facilities open and available for households to obtain their benefits. State agencies must mail ATP cards, coupons, or EBT cards (and post benefits to the EBT account and provide all the training and PIN numbers) in time to assure that the recipient can access his benefits before the 30-day standard expires.

In an EBT system, the client has the opportunity to participate:

- 24 hours after the client is notified by *phone or in person* to come into the office to pick up his card (assuming benefits are posted to the account and the client has his PIN number, or will be provided his PIN number when he comes in to get his card).
- Three days after he has been notified by *mail* to come in and pick up his card (assuming benefits are posted to his account and the client has his PIN number, or will be provided his PIN number when he comes in to get his card).

In a coupon system, the client has the opportunity to participate within the 30-day processing standard:

- When coupons are mailed by the 27th day.
- When the ATP card is mailed by the 27th day and the issuance facilities are open on the 30th day.

Question 8: Do States code timeliness of application processing (item 71(b) for performance year 2003 and 68 for performance year 2004) for all reviews or just for those that are completed?

Answer 8: States should complete Timeliness of Application Processing for all cases, including: completed, not subject to review, and incomplete cases. We are requiring the completion of this item for all cases to maximize the amount of information available on application processing.

Question 9: What kind of documentation is needed to support State findings?

Answer 9: Documentation should include the date the most recent application was filed, preferably a copy of the application showing the date, and the benefit history for the case that indicates when the client had an opportunity to participate.

Question 10: What if there is insufficient documentation to establish the timeliness of application processing (e.g. missing case record)?

Answer 10: For performance measure year FY 2003, if after a thorough review of case circumstances and records, there is no documentation, application or other information to determine timeliness, the case should be coded “9” Unknown. For cases with this problem, every effort should be made to determine the timeliness of the case before deciding to use the “Unknown” code.

For performance year FY 2004, if after a thorough review of case circumstances and records, there is no documentation, application or other information to determine timeliness, the case should be coded 3, Other. For cases with this problem, every effort should be made to determine the timeliness of the case before deciding to use the “Other” code.

Question 11: Will the data be validated?

Answer 11: Yes, Federal reviewers will examine the data during the Federal re-review process and possibly at the end of the review period.

Question 12: Will states be allowed to arbitrate these findings?

Answer 12: Disagrees on timeliness of application processing during the Federal re-review process are subject to informal resolution and arbitration. The regional office will notify the State agency when they disagree with the coding for timeliness of application processing.

Question 13: Is timeliness of application processing a protected field on the FNS-380-1?

Answer 13: For performance year FY 2003, item 71(b) is no longer a protected field.

For performance year FY 2004, item 68 is not a protected field.

EXAMPLES OF CASES INCLUDED IN THE PERFORMANCE MEASURE

EXAMPLE ONE

Client receives food stamp benefits from January through June. An application for recertification is sent, but the client does not send it back and does not complete the recertification process. On July 10, he contacts the office and completes an application. His benefits are approved effective July 10. The certification period is July through December. The sample month is July.

Include in the performance measure and evaluate for timeliness because the 30-day/7-day processing standard applies to the July application

EXAMPLE TWO

Client's certification period is January through June. Because the local office did not correctly enter his apartment number, his notice of expiration and application to recertify were not delivered to the client. When he had no benefits in his account on July 5, he contacted the certification office and found his case had closed June 30. He came into the office on July 6 and reapplied. The certification office opened his benefits effective July 6. The certification period is July through December and the sample month is September.

Include in the performance measure and evaluate for timeliness because the 30-day/7-day processing standard applies to the July application.

EXAMPLE THREE

Client's certification period is January through June. In April, the client starts a job that makes him ineligible for benefits, and his case is terminated May 31. He loses his job on May 25, receives his final pay on June 2, and reapplies for food

assistance on June 3. His benefits are approved effective June 3. The certification period is June through November. The sample month is August.

Include in the performance measure and evaluate for timelines because the 30-day/7-day processing standard applies to the June 3rd application.

EXAMPLE FOUR

Client moved from Oregon to Washington, where the certification period for his benefits was January through June. He reported in May to the local office (in Washington State) that he had moved here and needed food assistance. Since he had already received May's benefits from Oregon, the application for May was denied and benefits were approved starting June 1. The sample month is June.

Include in the performance measure and evaluate for timeliness because the 30-day/7-day processing standard applies to the May application.

EXAMPLE FIVE

Client was in a FS household (FS HH) with her parents. The certification period for this FS HH was January through June. The client moved out on her own in May and applied for benefits on May 15. Benefits for May were denied because she had already received benefits through her parents' FS HH for May. Benefits were approved effective June 1. The sample month is June.

Include in the performance measure and evaluate for timeliness because the 30-day/7-day processing standard applies to the June application.

EXAMPLES OF CASES NOT INCLUDED IN THE PERFORMANCE MEASURE

EXAMPLE ONE

Client receives food assistance from September through March. He receives an application on March 20 to recertify his benefits. He turns it in and completes the recertification process. His benefits are recertified effective April 1. The sample month is April.

This is a recertification and is not included in the performance measure. The 30-day/7-day processing standard does not apply to this application

EXAMPLE TWO

Client's certification period is September through February. He receives his application to recertify his case on January 20. He sends it in on February 2.

Because of an oversight in scheduling, he is not provided with an appointment to recertify. His case closes February 28. He contacts the local office on March 3 because he never got any benefits and instead received a notice informing him his case would close February 28. The certification office interviews him and reopens his case effective March 1. The sample month is March.

This is a recertification and is not included in the performance measure. The 30-day/7-day processing standard does not apply to this application.

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO CODE SPECIFIC CASE SITUATIONS:

EXAMPLE ONE

Client filed an application in January and was entitled to expedited service. Certification period was January through June. Case was recertified on July 1 for July through December. Sample month is August. How should this be coded for type of action, expedited service, and timeliness of application processing?

For performance year FY 2003, this item would not be included in the performance measure. Item 11, type of action, would be coded “2” recertification and item 19, expedited service would be coded “3” not entitled to expedited service. Item 71(b) would be coded “1” recertification.

For performance year FY 2004, item 21, type of action, should be coded as “2” recertification and item 26, expedited service, should be coded as “3” not entitled to expedited service. Include in the performance measure since the client applied for benefits in January, a date within the performance year. Item 68 would be coded “1” or “2”, timely or not timely respectively, depending upon whether the client had the opportunity to participate within seven days of filing the application in January.

EXAMPLE TWO

Client is certified for October through March. In May, client reapplies for benefits and is certified for May through August. In September the client is recertified for benefits for September through February. Case is sampled in September of the performance year. Is this case included in the timeliness measure? If it is measured, which new application is included in the measure?

For performance year 2003, do not include in the performance measure. Item 71(b) should be coded “1” recertification.

For performance year 2004, include in the performance measure and evaluate for timeliness. Review the most recent new application that is prior to the sample

month. In this instance, review the May application. Code “1” timely or “2” not timely based on the evaluation of the processing of the May application.

EXAMPLE THREE

Client received 2-month expedited service certification for October and November. Case was sampled in December, the third month of participation. Certification period had expired but the household continued to receive benefits. Since this case is participating outside of a certification period how should it be coded for timeliness of application processing?

For performance year 2003, include in the measure. Review the initial certification since it occurred in the measure year and it was the only action on this case. Item 71(b) should be coded “3” or “4”, depending upon whether expedited benefits were provided timely.

For performance year FY 2004, include in the measure. Review the initial certification since it occurred in the measure year and it was the only action on this case. Item 68 will be coded “1” or “2”, timely or not timely respectively, depending on whether expedited benefits were provided timely.

EXAMPLE FOUR

Client received 2-month expedited service certification for September and October. Case was sampled in December, the fourth month of participation. Certification period had expired but the household continued to receive benefits. Since this case is participating outside of a certification period how should it be coded for timeliness of application processing?

For performance year FY 2003, this case would not be included in the performance measure. In item 71(b), this case would be coded “2” application date is before the beginning of the current year.

For performance year FY 2004, this case would not be included in the performance measure. The only action on this case was the application in September, which is not in the performance year being measured. For item 68, this case would be coded “3” Other.